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AUTHOR McCown, Darlene; Sharma, Chandra
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the social competencies and behavioral problems of a national sample of pastors' children and to compare them to age and sex standardized norms. Data on 98 children between 4 and 16 years of age were obtained by using the Child Behavior Checklist with a random sample of 62 families. Pastors' children have traditionally been thought to have more behavioral problems than other children, since they face high expectations and are part of families which are often under public scrutiny. Findings indicated that scores for both boys and girls at each age grouping fell well within the acceptable norms for social competencies and behavioral problems. (Author/RH)

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THE BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT OF CLERGY CHILDREN

Darlene McCown and Chandra Sharma

University of Rochester

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Darlene McCown is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Chandra Sharma is a doctoral student at the University of Rochester School of Nursing in Rochester, New York.

The behavioral adjustment of clergy children

Abstract

Pastors' children have traditionally been thought to have more behavioral problems than other children since they face high expectations and are part of families which are often under public scrutiny. The purpose of this study was to describe the social competencies and behavioral problems of a national sample of pastors' children, ages 4-16 years, and to compare them to age and sex standardized norms. Data was obtained on 98 children from a random sample of 62 families using the Child Behavior Checklist. Results indicate that scores for both boys and girls at each age grouping fell within the acceptable norms for both social competencies and behavioral problems.

THE BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT OF CLERGY CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Pastors have traditionally been regarded as keepers of societies' "moral rights". As such, the social expectations upon pastors and their families may reflect higher standards than those for other individuals. Such behaviors as alcohol use and infidelity which are generally regarded as commonplace may constitute highly unacceptable conduct for those in pastoral families. This conflict between religious expectations and prevailing social norms may be imposed by the religious community as well as by family members' internalized expectations of themselves.

Children within pastoral families are also not immune to such pressures. Pastor's children, or "PK's" as they are often called, have traditionally been regarded as "special" and thought to have more behavioral problems than other children. From an early age, pastors' children face considerable expectations from within the family as well as from the greater community. These youngsters have been raised in strong Christian surroundings which have high moral standards for right and wrong behavior. The public nature inherent in being part of a pastoral family often entails being in the public eye as a role model for the parish and carries the expectation of exemplary conduct.

BACKGROUND

In spite of the potential stressors facing pastor's children, there is virtually no empirical information regarding their actual behavior and

functioning. The few anecdotal notes available offer conflicting views, presenting them as either "normal" children or as children with a sense of inferiority or low self esteem and in need of help.

This study built upon a pilot study in 1987 investigating the behavioral problems and social competencies of a sample of PK's in Southern California and Arizona. The subjects were 42 children, ages 4-16 years, of pastors actively involved in church ministry. The results of the pilot study indicated that the pastors children did not differ significantly from the population in behavioral problems and had higher social competency.

The purpose of this study was to extend the initial pilot by describing the social competencies and behavioral problems of a national sample of pastors children, ages 4 to 16 years, and to compare them to age and sex standardized norms.

Based on the pilot study and the available literature, it was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference between pastors' children and the general population in behavioral problems or in social competency.

PROCEDURE AND METHODS

Subjects for the study were a random sample of pastors' families drawn from the Free Methodist Church of the United States and their children between the ages of 4 and 16 years. Families were selected proportionally to the geographical distribution of pastoral families in the continental United States. A mailed survey technique was used. A total of 238 families were sent study materials. Sixty two families completed and returned the survey, resulting in a 26% response rate. The response rate was

somewhat higher from families in western states (32%) than from those in other regions of the country, where it was 20-23%.

Although there was concern about the response rate of 26%, there was geographical representation from all regions of the country. The denominational criteria for credentialing of clergy would also suggest homogeneity in the population. Furthermore, the findings of this study were similar to those of the regional pilot study which had a response rate of 60%. Although there was no particular reason to believe that non respondents were different from the respondents, the response rate must be kept in mind when interpreting this data.

Information about the behavioral problems and social competencies of the children was obtained from parents using a standardized tool, the revised Child Behavior Checklist developed by Achenbach and Edelbrock in 1981. Parents were asked to complete the CBCL for children between the ages of 4 and 16 years. Achenbach has reported a high correlation between mothers and fathers ratings of their children using this measure. In this study, the ratings were completed by either parent. The CBCL was completed by the mother for about three quarters of the children and by fathers for the remaining families. There were no systematic differences between fathers' and mothers' ratings.

The CBCL contains a list of 118 behaviors and 22 social competencies commonly observed in children. The CBCL yields a total social competency score as well as a total behavioral problems score. The social competency score reflects the childs' activities, social functioning and school performance. Behavioral problems encompass both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. Internalizing behaviors include such

things as crying, sleep disturbances, nightmares, sadness, guilt and somatic complaints. Examples of externalizing behaviors are hyperactivity, demanding attention, disobedience, poor school performance and stealing. The CBCL has been extensively used in clinical and empirical work and is considered to have excellent psychometric qualities.

SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 98 pastors' children from 62 families. The children were between the ages of 4 and 16 years. There were 50 boys and 48 girls. Children were grouped into 3 age categories (4-5, 6-11 and 12-16 years) since available norms are based on these groupings. Approximately half of the children were in the 6-11 age range, while about one fifth were ages 4-5 and one quarter were between 12 and 16 years. The distribution of children by age and sex is summarized in table 1.

RESULTS

The results of this study supported the hypothesis that pastors' children are within the normative range in regards to social competency and behavioral problems. The sample of pastors' children was compared to standardized norms according to sex, age and both age and sex. The difference between mean scores of the sample and standardized mean scores was examined using t-tests. The CBCL has been standardized across age and sex so that the normative mean is 50 with a standard deviation of 10 for all categories. This standardization allows comparisons across groups and sexes.

In regards to sex differences, girls were found to be above the norm in social competence ($t=2.47$, $p<0.05$), while boys were above the norm in behavior problems ($t=3.74$, $p<0.01$). Sex differences are summarized in table 2.

The sample was then compared to norms according to age groups. There was no difference between younger children, ages 4-5 years and the norms in either social competence or behavioral problems. In children ages 6-11 years, the sample was above the norm in social competence ($t=2.75$, $p<0.01$), but no different from the norm in behavioral problems. This finding was reversed in the oldest group of children, 12-16 years, who were no different from the norm in social competence but above in behavioral problems ($t=3.2$, $p<0.01$). Age differences are presented in table 3.

The last analysis compared children in the sample with the norms by both age and sex. School aged girls were above the norms in regards to social competence scores ($t=3.09$, $p<0.01$). This was also true for adolescent boys ($t=2.22$, $p<0.05$), who, interestingly, also had higher behavior problem scores than the norms ($t=4.03$, $p<0.01$). Girls did not differ from the norm in behavioral problems at any age group. Age by sex differences are summarized in table 4.

In the CBCL, scores which are greater than two standard deviations from the norm, or greater than the 90th percentile, are considered to be suggestive of serious behavioral disturbance. Achenbach and Edelbrock reported that 9.3% of children in the general population would be expected to receive scores in these categories. This study found only 5.1% of children having such scores, indicating that the incidence of disturbance is well under that which would be expected in the general population.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study supported the hypothesis that pastors' children are generally within the normative range in regards to social competency and behavioral problems. Analysis of the data did reveal some statistically significant differences between parents ratings of their children and established norms. This was particularly true in regards to teenage boys. As a group, these boys were seen as having significantly increased behavior problems by their parents. These parental perceptions may contribute to the idea that PK's have problems, when, in reality, their behavior falls well within the normal range.

It is interesting that this same group of boys were also rated as having higher social competency than the norm. This further supports that the behavior of these children was actually normal, since high social competence and increased behavioral problems would not be expected to co-exist.

Although there has been some speculation that the children of pastors' may face additional stressors related to parental expectations and being in the public eye, the results of this study suggest that these stressors do not adversely affect the social competency or increase the incidence of behavioral problems in these children. In fact, teen age boys and school age girls had greater social competency than the norm. It may be that pastors' families possess certain strengths and resources which are able to assist the child in coping with the expectations and public nature of being part of a pastoral family.

Resources which may be present in pastoral familes include well educated parents with stable marriages, extensive social networks,

spiritual strengths and divine intervention. Although expectations of children may be high from both the family and the community, it is also likely that these expectations have been consistent and unambiguous, so that children have been able to acclimate to them. From an early age on, children are likely to have had frequent opportunities for socialization within the religious community, and parents may have been able to model expected behaviors and ways of dealing with others.

The exploratory findings of this study are useful to family professionals because it verifies that children who are part of highly visible families appear to be no different in social competency or behavioral problems than children in the population at large.

When such children do have difficulties, there may be widespread, sensationalized coverage which often evokes images of troubled, tragic childhoods. However, it must be kept in mind that such situations may truly represent the exceptions and contribute to false perceptions based on very small numbers. It may therefore be inaccurate to assume that children who are "in the public eye" are a group at special risk for social and behavioral problems. Families may possess a number of strengths and resources which are able to mitigate the impact of stressors facing these chidren.

The results of this study can also be used to provide feedback and reassurance to parents regarding the functioning of their children. Close to half of the parents in this study indicated that they wished to be notified of their children's scores on the CBCL, suggesting that pastoral parents find such information to be useful. Disseminating the results of this study would be beneficial in encouraging parents to have positive perceptions of their children's functioning and foster age appropriate expectations.

Although these may be interesting speculations, the preliminary nature of this work must be emphasized. While a random mailing was conducted, the generalizability of the study is limited due to the low response rate as well as the fact that a single denomination was used. It is possible that social desirability may have influenced the willingness of parents to accurately report their children's behavior.

There are a number of directions which would be valuable to pursue in future research. These include replication of the study in different religious denominations with greater variability in family characteristics, as well as with other types of families who may have children in the "public eye". It would also be useful to obtain multiple measures of children's behavior and examine them for convergence. Alternative versions of the CBCL for teachers and a self report for children themselves are available. Finally, it would be valuable to obtain further insight into the environment and dynamics of pastoral families in order to better understand the contextual factors which influence the development of these children.

TABLE 1
CHILDRENS' CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics	n	%
SEX		
Boys	50	51.02
Girls	48	48.97
AGE		
4 - 5 years	17	17.3
Boys	9	9.18
Girls	8	8.16
6 - 11 years	54	55.10
Boys	28	28.57
Girls	26	26.53
12 - 16 years	27	27.55
Boys	13	13.26
Girls	14	14.28

TABLE 2
SEX COMPARISONS TO CBCL NORMS

GROUP	n	SOC COMP		BEHAV PROBS	
		X	SD	X	SD
BOYS	50	53.34	12.42	55.28**	10.00
GIRLS	48	54.18*	11.7	50.38	8.31
NORM		50	10	50	10

*t=2.47, p<0.05 **t=3.74, p<0.01.

TABLE 3
AGE COMPARISON TO CBCL NORMS

GROUP	n	SOC COMP X	SD	BEHAV PROBS X	SD
4-5 yrs.	17	53.23	16.45	53.00	10.54
6-11 yrs.	54	54.4*	11.78	51.64	9.60
12-16 yrs.	27	52.5	9.3	55.07**	8.38
Norm		50	10	50	10

*t=2.75, p<0.01 **t=3.2, p<0.01.

TABLE 4
AGE BY SEX COMPARISONS TO CBCL NORMS

GROUP	n	SOC COMP X	SOC COMP SD	BEHAV PROBS X	BEHAV PROBS SD
BOYS					
4-5 yrs.	9	53	16.3	55.4	9.4
6-11 yrs.	28	52.9	13.3	53.8	11.1
12-16 yrs.	13	54.5*	7.3	58.4**	7.5
Norm		50	10	50	10
GIRLS					
4-5 yrs.	8	53.5	17.7	50.2	11.6
6-11 yrs.	26	56***	9.9	49.2	7.0
12-16 yrs.	14	51.1	11	52.5	8.5
Norm		50	10	50	10
TOTAL	98	53.6	11.99	52.8	9.46

*t=2.22, p<0.05 **t=4.03, p<0.01 ***t=3.09, p<0.01